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LATIN AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS, HUMAN RIGHTS EXPLORED

Introduction

Havana TRICONTINENTAL in English No 115, 1979 pp 2-64

[Magazine published by executive secretariat of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America]

[Text] To the Reader

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*Can torture, indefinite imprisonment, physical disappearance and death destroy a patriot's ideals?*

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*The honorable attitude of political prisoners in Latin America and the Caribbean is the answer that thousands of men and women have given to the jailers of the reactionary and fascist regimes.*

*It is not a matter of resolute stoicism, but of belief in their struggle and the justice of their cause.*

*Thousands of men, women and even children spend a living death in the sinister dungeons of the police, the garrisons and safe houses of paramilitary and terrorist Latin-American groups.*

*They aren't criminals or antisocial persons. They are professionals, peasants, workers and students who have raised their voices against oppression and crime.*

*Now they are isolated from their families, as if they had a contagious disease, and their bodies are wracked with the most horrible tortures used by the forces of reaction.*

*The following pages have nothing to do with past situations of Nazi barbarity during World War II or with the long darkness of the Inquisition. This is taking place in America today, at the height of the 20th century.*

*It is the unlimited violation of mankind's most basic human rights, a trampling of the human status, an attempt to turn men into beasts, humiliate them and break them.*

*In spite of President Carter's demagoguery on human rights, genocide is being committed in Nicaragua, and barbarous crimes are taking place in Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and other republics because of the aid, cover and support the US government provides for those regimes.*



*It is an occurrence that, because it happens daily, may, perhaps, seem reasonable to some "democratic" publications. But it would be unpardonable to contribute to the oblivion of those who suffer and hope.*

*Our publication offers only a very limited view of what has been wrought by the whole machinery of terror imposed on our lands in a vain attempt to crush our people's freedom aspirations.*

*It is a fruitless effort by gorillas, henchmen, reactionary dictators and puppets of US imperialism, because it only heightens the rebellion, honor and dignity of our exploited masses.*

*At this very moment, all the people in many a Latin-American country are denied the most basic human rights.*

*The infinite pain of these humans beings is a call, a demand for all worthy men and women to join the Latin-American movement of democratic and progressive forces to free the political prisoners, halt the torture, locate those who have disappeared and end, once and for all, this shameful, antihuman practice.*

#### Habeas Organization Created

Havana TRICONTINENTAL in English No 115, 1979 pp 4-7

[Text]

*On December 20, 1978, Gabriel García Márquez, the prestigious Colombian intellectual, announced the formation, under his leadership, of an organization called HABEAS, whose main purpose is concern for political prisoners, exiles and persons who have disappeared in Latin America and the Caribbean.*

*The name comes from habeas corpus ("one of a variety of writs that may be issued to bring a party before a court or judge, having as its function the release of a party from unlawful restraint," according to The American Heritage Dictionary). Many Latin-American figures, including Presidents, intellectuals and even Cardinals, sponsored the effort and issued a call to join forces to eliminate torture, respect life and halt terror in the Americas.*

*The Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL) warmly salutes the formation of HABEAS — whose headquarters will be in Mexico — and supports its just cause, that of more effectively mitigating the horrible circumstances in which thousands upon thousands of people in our hemisphere are being persecuted today by fascist and dictatorial regimes.*

Latin America, land that Bolívar, San Martín, O'Higgins, Artigas, Juárez, Martí and so many other giants of our history impregnated with freedom, continues to be the area of the world where torture is most repeatedly practiced, where thousands of honest fighters for democracy and justice remain imprisoned, where a great number of men and women disappear into the darkness without leaving a trace, kidnapped by institutions of political repression or by bands that don't even try to hide the official backing for their actions. It is an area in which insecurity, persecution, violation of citizens' rights, the most gross arbitrariness, humiliation and degradation of the dignity of man prevail to an infuriating degree.

These realities make us singularly aware of the imperative need for the broadest and most effective Latin-American solidarity with all those who believe in justice and respect for human dignity, in a common and united effort that goes beyond political affiliation, religious belief and ideological commitment.

No honorable person can remain indifferent knowing that, in his own country or somewhere else in the hemisphere, a man or a woman is constantly being dragged into the infernal abyss of torture; knowing, too, that there are patriots whose lives are consumed behind the tyrannies' bars and relatives who suffer the agony of never finding their comrade, child, father or brother who has disappeared.

So we call on all democratic and progressive political and social organizations and individuals in Latin America, the Caribbean and throughout the world to join efforts and expend all possible energy to see that torture is eliminated, life is respected and the political prisoners are freed; that terror, kidnapping and disappearances cease and all exiled persons have a right to return to their homelands.

We call for a sustained struggle to achieve broad amnesty for all those persecuted or unjustly imprisoned.

We call for the broadest possible mobilization of all democratic and humanitarian social sectors in order to promote various forms of coordination to carry forward this noble, just and compelling effort in those countries of Latin America and the Caribbean where it is possible and expedient.

This effort must become a powerful campaign of solidarity with the peoples of Latin America who suffer from tyranny, barbarity and the denial of their basic human rights.

## Paraguayan Prisoners

Havana TRICONTINENTAL in English No 115, 1979 pp 8-20

[Article by Sara Arias: "At Least There's Light"]

[Text] *This vital, energetic man with a clear gaze that shows understanding and humanity, this simple, affable comrade with his healthy sense of humor, doesn't appear to be 62 years old.*

*Antonio Maidana is a living example of a human being's victory over repressive barbarity. This old fighter — "old" not because of his age but because of his early revolutionary militancy — has a long history in the struggle, in prison and under torture. He spent 19 years in the dungeons of the Stroessner dictatorship, until the combativity of the Paraguayan people and increasing international solidarity forced his release in January, 1977.*

*A teacher by profession, he taught from 1939 to 1941, when he went underground, was arrested and was sent to a concentration camp in the Chaco for a year. From there, he was transferred to another prison in the northern part of the country, from which he escaped. Soon afterwards, he was captured and again sent to the Chaco. Later he was imprisoned in Encarnación, in the south.*

*There, in 1944, he again began to teach, in a grammar school. After a few months, he was arrested and turned over to the Argentine police. Finally, he and some other comrades managed to get to Uruguay, where they received broad support from the Uruguayan teachers and the rest of the people.*

*The repression let up for a while in 1946, after the defeat of fascism in World War II, and he returned to his country and taught grammar school there for a few months. When the repression increased, however, he had to go underground again and give up teaching in order to devote himself completely to political-revolutionary activity. He was imprisoned again, this time for two years.*

*As a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Paraguayan Communist Party, he was arrested by the Stroessner dictatorship, along with other PCP leaders, in August, 1958. While he was still in prison, he was elected President of the Paraguayan Communist Party, during its 3rd Congress, held in 1971.*

*Tricontinental's questions to the revolutionary leader touch on the situation of political prisoners in Paraguay and his own experiences as a prisoner, human rights, the causes of the repression, what's happening now in Paraguay and how it relates to the international political movement.*

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*We asked our interviewee to explain how, with its sellout policy and growing unemployment, the Paraguayan dictatorship can present itself as a regime that offers "growth and stability" for investors.*

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*"Paraguay's dictatorship is sustained chiefly by US imperialism. For nearly 40 years, there has been a permanent state of siege, torture, murder of patriots, concentration camps and fascist repressive laws; the worst period — the last 25 years — is the period that General Alfredo Stroessner has been in power.*

*"At the last plenary meeting of our Party, it was pointed out that the Stroessner government is a fascist dictatorship at the service of the transnationals, other (chiefly US and Brazilian) foreign monopolies and the oligarchy of latifundists and capitalists linked to imperialism. It can be said that it is the most sellout, corrupt and terrorist dictatorship of all those that have held power since 1870.*

*"In order to understand Stroessner's repressive policy, you must realize that his entire economic policy has been and is characterized by the systematic sellout to foreign capital, on neocolonial terms, of the country's natural wealth, major branches of production and national territory."*



He went on to cite as examples the Treaty of Itaipú, covering construction of a huge hydroelectric center that will hand Paraguay's major known wealth over to the Brazilian monopolies, with the US monopolies standing behind them; the refining and marketing of totally imported oil and its by-products, monopolized by REPSA, a subsidiary of Standard Oil; and the exploration for and exploitation of oil throughout Paraguayan territory by two or three US oil monopolies, one of which has a concession covering 7 million hectares in the eastern part of the country. The exploitation and marketing of uranium and other minerals in that area, covering 159 000 hectares, is in the hands of another US enterprise.

"The interests of the imperialist monopolies are intimately linked to those of the big latifundists, according to FAO figures, which place 32 percent of the country's territory in the hands of latifundists and foreign enterprises. In addition, there are more than 200 000 Brazilian colonists living all along the border, and — as the Manifesto of our Party's Central Committee states — this occupation of our territory, which Stroessner had extolled and encouraged, opens the way to annexation, in line with the dangerous policy of living, mobile borders sustained by the fascist military dictatorship of Brazil.

"These, then, are the interests of the class that the Stroessner dictatorship represents and defends through police terror, torture, murder of patriots in their homes and in the street, disappearances and fascist laws alleged to be in defense of democracy, public peace and individual freedom, which are directed against the Communist Party in particular and the country's whole democratic movement in general."

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*We asked the leader of the Paraguayan Communist Party to tell us about relations with the United States, especially with respect to its "human rights" policy.*

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"In line with what I've already said, you can see the Carter administration's demagoguery concerning human rights in Paraguay, a demagoguery that is mainly guided by the interests of the imperialist monopolies. The US Ambassador to Paraguay has stated that our country has made progress in the defense of human rights and that the United States will, therefore, continue its military and economic aid to Paraguay.

"Last year alone, the Stroessner dictatorship received more than \$90 million in loans from financial institutions under the control of the US government, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

"It must be pointed out that Stroessner's entire foreign policy is identified with the most backward and reactionary regimes known to mankind: the racist and fascist regime of South Africa, Pinochet's fascist regime and the most reactionary and fascist sectors in other countries. It is also a complete tool of the Brazilian fascist military dictatorship; it has taken an active part in the most horrendous crimes committed by Pinochet — such as murdering Letelier and providing his assassins with false documents — and it has accepted an intermediary role in order to send arms to the South African racist regime."

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*What is your opinion of the recently established Democratic Front of Paraguay?*

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"The most important factor in the Paraguayan political situation is not exactly what imperialism and the dictatorship do, but rather the struggles of our people. The plenary sessions of our Party's CC pointed out that the mass struggle reached new heights this past year, the Stroessner dictatorship was further isolated and the forces opposing the dictatorship became more unified. There was an upsurge in the working class struggle for higher wages; against the high cost of living and the violation of the 8-hour

workday; and against mass firings and the pro-boss, pro-police policy of the clique that runs the central workers' organization.

"At various points in the country, the peasants are energetically resisting being pushed off the land, while stepping up the struggle to obtain loans and gain fair prices for agricultural products. The students have also intensified their struggles against high university fees, entrance exams and the dictatorship's maneuvers to place corrupt and incompetent professors in the university. The people are protesting the constant increase in the price of meat and other basic necessities, coupled with higher taxes.

"For the first time in many years the intellectuals are moving: 95 writers, journalists, university professors, composers, artists and leaders of political parties signed a public document demanding that the government reveal the fate of those who have disappeared, release the political prisoners and lift the state of siege. At the end of the year, Paraguayan Youth for Human Rights launched a campaign for those objectives, and a Congress for Human Rights, organized by the Commission for Human Rights, headed by Madame Carmen de Lara Castro, was held in our country.

"As a reflection of this development in our people's struggles and their desire for unity, efforts have also been made to unify the legal opposition parties. The Authentic Radical Liberal (LRA), the February Revolutionary (FR) and the Christian Democratic (DC) Parties have reached an agreement on the struggle against the dictatorship and have established a coordinating committee. According to the leaders of these groups, the agreement is open for other parties' and movements' participation, and its platform is based on the demand for clarification concerning the patriots who have disappeared, freedom for all political prisoners, the lifting of the state of siege, general amnesty and other democratic demands.

"Although our Party proposes that an anti-imperialist and antilatifundist front be formed, in line with our minimum platform of unity, we greet the agreement the three opposition parties have reached as a positive and important factor. We believe it should be broadened, without excluding any antidictatorial forces. We

are working and will continue to work to reach joint agreements for action in the work places and in the schools, in the poor neighborhoods of the capital and throughout the country, with all the forces that are opposed to the Stroessner clique — even if it's only for a single economic or democratic demand on which diverse sectors of opinion agree.

"We are optimistic because we know our people are not alone in this struggle. The significance of the fact that socialist Cuba has completed 20 years of revolution is a great stimulus, a great encouragement, a great security for the future of our people and all Latin-American peoples."

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*There are sectors within the Armed Forces that are tired of Stroessner or are contending for power. What alternative could they offer?*

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"As never before in the past, public opinion is mobilized against the openly neocolonialist character of the agreements and treaties that hand the country's wealth over to the foreign monopolies. This mobilization — which has included all political sectors of the country — has had its repercussions within the Army, where there are patriotic sectors that are tired of being Stroessner's tool and no longer accept the fact that his fascist clique is surrendering Paraguay's natural resources to foreign capital in the name of the Armed Forces.

"The Communist Party believes that the way out of the situation in our country is not through the electoral farce that Stroessner holds every five years, or any other maneuver designed to keep the dictatorship in power in some other form; rather, the broad antidictatorial front that we propose as the ultimate necessity can only be formed through mass struggle — the struggle of the workers, peasants, students, businessmen, teachers, intellectuals and all other progressive civilian and military forces.

"We believe that all forms of struggle must be used, depending on the specific

conditions that exist during the course of this process. We consider that the anti-dictatorial national front our Party proposes as a reflection of our people's feelings and demands for unifying the opposing forces should be such that it creates the proper conditions for permitting the overthrow of the military dictatorship and the establishment, in its place, of a democratic government, thus opening the way to deep agrarian, democratic and anti-imperialist reforms that can lead to socialism."

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*What role do you think the Church has played in recent years?*

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"It can be said that, in 1968, the Catholic Church in our country stopped supporting the dictatorship — as it had before — and began to play a positive role in our people's struggle for human rights. Monsignor Ismael Rolón, head of the Paraguayan Church, refused to go on taking part in the Council of State — of which he is constitutionally a member. When he withdrew, he made a public statement saying he could not continue, because to do so would be to identify himself with the policy of the regime."

He went on to mention the persecution of the Church, especially in 1974, '75 and '76, when there were attacks on peasant communities, raids on schools and monasteries, arrests and deportations of priests, etc.

"We know that other religious bodies are being persecuted now and are banned by the government for reasons of state security, which is the 'argument' they always give for persecuting all democratic sectors."

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*I just saw a wire story stating that the Radical Liberal Party had asked the Paraguayan government to provide "a broad amnesty for the hundreds of compatriots scattered throughout Latin America." What is your view of this?*

"The request reflects the fact that amnesty is such a profound demand by our people, such a generalized feeling, that even this group in the Parliament supports it. You must realize that this party was promoted by Stroessner himself. It is an outgrowth of the old Radical Liberal Party that now calls itself the Authentic Radical Liberal Party."

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*You mentioned the fact that what happens in Paraguay cannot be isolated from the context of what goes on in the rest of Latin America — especially in neighboring countries — and in the rest of the world, as well. Now, then, do you think the development of recent events in Bolivia and in Brazil (where there is an upsurge in the mass struggle and a very strong fight for amnesty) can influence events in Paraguay?*

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"We believe that events in Brazil and Bolivia, the heroic struggle of the Nicaraguan people and the Chilean people's resistance to Pinochet's fascist tyranny have a positive influence on our people. From this point of view, what happens in Bolivia and Brazil naturally has a fairly direct influence on Paraguay, because the fascist regime that held power in Bolivia was very closely linked to Stroessner, while the fascist military dictatorship in Brazil — as US imperialism's gendarme, which is what it is — has the greatest political influence on our country."

"The overwhelming defeat of the Brazilian government in the last election encouraged our people in their struggle against the tyranny and was undoubtedly a useful experience that we Paraguayans will be able to use to good advantage."

"It should also be pointed out that the great triumph of the people of Kampuchea, that blazing victory against imperialism and its followers — particularly Maoism — will be an extremely valuable stimulus for our people and for all the peoples of Latin America, a very useful experience for the entire world revolutionary movement."

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*The news agencies talk about the periodic liberation of political prisoners ...*

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"That's true. As it becomes more isolated nationally and internationally, the dictatorship has launched a great propaganda campaign designed to show that the country is becoming more democratic and that some prisoners have been freed because of Stroessner's good will and the intervention of the Carter administration. This is completely false. Stroessner's fascist dictatorship has been forced to release some political prisoners — including the women who had small children with them, children born in the dungeons — because of the pressure of our people's struggle and of international solidarity, particularly that of the socialist countries, led by the Soviet Union. There were major advances in this field in 1978.

"Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that a number of patriots are still in prison. It should be noted that the dictatorship was forced, by this pressure, to close down the Emboscada concentration camp; but the prisoners who were being held in that sinister place were transferred to cells in various police stations in the capital, where there are also some prisoners who have been held for 15 years without having been brought to trial — such as the labor leader Severo Acosta Aranda, the engineer and professor Virgilio Barreiro and Captain Napoleón Ortigosa, who has been in jail for 18 years.

"The most serious problem is that of the political prisoners who have disappeared. Many patriots have disappeared during the 40 years of dictatorship in our country. During the '60s, a number of guerrillas were taken prisoner and murdered; their mutilated bodies were then thrown in the Paraná River. Before that, there had also been cases of political prisoners who disappeared. From the end of 1975 to mid-1976, however, nearly 30 comrades were arrested and tortured and then disappeared without a trace. Comrade Miguel Ángel Soler, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Paraguayan Communist Party, was arrested on November 30, 1975, in Asunción; was tor-

tured; and then disappeared. Derliz Villagra, Secretary of the Communist Youth of Paraguay, suffered the same fate; so did labor leader Rubén González Acosta. Juan José Penayo, a tailor, was arrested in the Argentine city of Iguazú, in Misiones Province, on the Paraguayan border, with another compatriot named Castro Vera Báez, and both were turned over to Stroessner's police. They were last seen in the Asunción Police Department of Investigations, from which they disappeared without a trace. The same thing has happened to many other patriots.

"Amílcar Oviedo, Captain Américo Villagra, Bienvenido Arguello, Carlos Mancuello, Rodolfo and Benjamin Ramírez Villalba, Diego Rodas, Albino Vera, Policarpo, Rodolfo and Francisco López and many others have been missing for nearly three years."

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*Through all these years, we have denounced the subhuman living conditions of Paraguayan political prisoners and have talked about their moral strength — the best example of which is here with us — but we would like for you to tell us about your experience and that of the other comrades: how you live and how you confront all this from within. What are the incentives, the small and big things that allow a human being to remain human and come through such a hard test victorious?*

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Maidana began to talk about prison conditions: "As you know, one of the forms of torture is what is known as the trough — and it is, really a trough, a tub filled with water that, in some cases, is full of excrement. The political prisoner is stripped, tied hand and foot and then submerged forcefully in the trough during the interrogation until he is semidrowned. This torture, which is also known as semidrowning, is applied to the elderly, to pregnant women and to children alike. Many patriots have died in the torture chamber. There is also the use of electric shock to make the prisoner betray his comrades in struggle. Then there is the



whip, which in our country is known by its Guaraní name: *teyuruguay*. This is a whip that looks like a lizard's tail, with a huge knot at one end used to beat the prisoner — sometimes to death. Many real patriots and revolutionaries prefer to die rather than betray their comrades. These torture methods have been used on people from all political sectors. It can be said that the enforcement of the law on the state of siege and the system of torture have hurt thousands of citizens. There are few families in our country that don't have somebody who has been subjected to these repressive methods of the dictatorship at some time during its 40 years of oppression.

"A unique characteristic of the Stroessner dictatorship, one that did not exist in the past, is the indefinite prison term — for decades — with or without trial. That is what happened, for example, to Comrade Alfredo Alcorta. Comrade Julio Rojas and me. As you know, we spent 19 years in Stroessner's dungeons. Although the so-called defense of democracy law — taken from Mussolini's and Hitler's legal codes — was used against us, we were sentenced to between one and two and a half years in prison; yet we were there for 19 years. Of course, we had already been subjected to every kind of physical and moral torture, which continued during the long period of our imprisonment.

"Comrade Alcorta was given the trough torture for several nights; Comrade Rojas was given 100 saber blows for resisting forced labor.

"For many years, the political prisoners were forced, at whiplash, to work with picks breaking up and extracting rocks from the Tacumbú quarry. After a long period of denunciation and struggle, this work system ended; but there was an attempt to reinstate it in September, 1976, when the Emboscada concentration camp was opened and the 400 political prisoners there were threatened with being subjected to that same kind of work again, in a nearby quarry.

"We prisoners put up mass resistance that forced the guards to abandon those plans, and, finally, as you know, this concentration camp was shut down.

"Many important struggles were waged there — collective hunger strikes by the political prisoners against the brutality of the prison system — and the experience was very important in showing that the Stroessner dictatorship had been unable to break the fighting morale of the political prisoners in spite of police terror during their many years in prison. This was a major factor in stimulating the people's struggles against the regime."

Eleven political prisoners were locked up in what you might call a cellar dungeon for three years. It was a narrow room — 2 by 4 meters — with a hole in the floor for a toilet and two small openings in the upper part of the wall instead of windows. The cell was always dark, and the extreme humidity of its walls seriously affected the prisoners' health, especially their sight.

"From there, we were transferred to another cell with a door made of iron bars rather than wood. With a door of iron bars, at least there's light."

They were not allowed to have books, paper or pencils and weren't even allowed to read religious books for 14 years.

"Naturally, we political prisoners looked for ways to spend our time during this period: studying, recalling what we had read in the past, teaching and learning at the same time, because, in prison, you teach what you know and learn whatever you can from others.

"We used little pieces of brick or anything else we could get our hands on to write on the floor, in order to occupy our time with mental, political work. We even studied geography, drawing a world map on the floor and writing on it with lemon juice, so its lines could never be erased.

"Because of the pressure of national and international public opinion, I was allowed to read, beginning in 1974, and later I was also allowed to have a radio, so that in 1975 and part of 1976 I was able to listen to broadcasts from Radio Havana and Radio Moscow and make contact with the world revolutionary movement again.

"I think I told you this once before, but I would like to mention again that the first news I had of the Cuban Revolution was in the Asunción public jail. In January, 1959, an issue of the magazine *Bohemia* reached my cell, through the



cooperation and solidarity of common prisoners. But then I was transferred to prisons where I was kept in solitary confinement.

"You might say that, in addition to this isolation, this system of solitary confinement, there were different forms of moral and physical torture: total lack of medical care, the denial of exercise periods in the fresh air, measures taken against relatives — such as the arrest of our wives and the exile of other relatives. Yet some relative always came to the prison daily, in spite of intense harassment by the guards."

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*Could your relatives communicate with you, or were you kept totally isolated from them?*

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"The system of visits was as follows: for a long time, I was allowed to see my family for two or three minutes a week, through bars. For other periods — sometimes as long as a year — I wasn't allowed to see them.

"In spite of this, the women didn't allow the police to intimidate them with threats, maneuvers and constant harassment; they continued to visit the prison at all times, even when they knew they couldn't see us. It's important to stress here the bravery of the women in this struggle for the defense of the security, life and freedom of their beloved relatives.

"It should be noted that women play a very important, even decisive, role in the revolutionary struggle of any people whose country is in the hands of fascists or fascist-type dictatorships that keep prisoners in jail for many years.

"During most of the time, they prevented us from receiving information, but sometimes news of one kind or another filtered through — as was the case with the battle of Playa Girón, for example. The enemy told us that imperialism had landed its troops there to choke off the Cuban Revolution. But our faith in the Cuban

people's struggle and in international solidarity was so deep that we didn't believe what they told us — and of course we didn't want to believe it, either — until, one day, a common prisoner who was cleaning the patio told us what had really happened — and that was the first news we had of the fact that Playa Girón had been an overwhelming defeat for US imperialism."

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*That means, then, that even the common prisoners sometimes felt solidarity for you....*

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"Yes; that happened, for example, during our first year of prison, when we were in jail with 500 common prisoners. In Paraguay, as in other capitalist countries, the common prisoners generally act as allies of the political prisoners, because they are usually people who have been unjustly imprisoned — peasants and workers who lack the necessary money to make the judges pay any attention to them.

"After we were put in solitary in police headquarters — where we were kept for so many years — the common prisoners sometimes cleaned the patio or came over to the cell for some reason or other, because it was a very well known fact that political prisoners had been held there for many years.

"The attitude of our neighbors also posed an interesting question. They sometimes learned about our situation because sick prisoners in the cell were denied medical attention, and only the screams from the cell would force the guards to provide it. Since there were 11 and sometimes 15 of us, we took turns screaming every two minutes, day and night, until the guard was forced to provide a doctor or some kind of medicine. The neighbors listened to our voices, and many expressed a solidarity (a broad smile here) that went far beyond the prison...."

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*Did the prison guards ever talk to you, or did they always act as provocateurs?*

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"There were some jailers that had a more favorable attitude, but they couldn't talk to us except in the presence of a superior — that is, the main head of the prison for that day. Our cell had a double bar, with a passage in front of it and iron doors at each end, controlled by a sentinel on each side. So we couldn't speak to the guards — and besides they were relieved periodically.

"We were taken out of the cell sometimes once every two weeks or every month and transferred to another while the guard entered ours and checked it out. The control was very strict. They entered the cell, destroyed everything in it, cut our clothes up, destroyed our pillows and the thin mattresses we had that our relatives had brought — and left everything scattered around as if a herd of horses had galloped through.

"Of course, in one such check they found two of Lenin's works we had hidden for a long time, sheets of paper and materials from our Party. In spite of the strict control and the frequent check, we political prisoners always found how and where to hide any little piece of paper we got hold of. We used these to try to reproduce a part of our theory, political economy, philosophy — anything that would help our studies in prison.

"Sometimes when we had a visit from our relatives, we were able to learn a little about the solidarity movement for our freedom, which made us very grateful. Once we had a radio, we could listen to some of the information from the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, such as that statement in favor of all those held prisoner by imperialism and the reaction; this confirmed our complete certainty that we would be set free someday.

"The occasions on which delegations visited our cell — one from Uruguay, another from Chile, one from Argentina headed by lawyers and members of that country's League for the Rights of Man — were also very important to us.

"We can say, then, that our ideology and the efforts we made to carry on a political life in prison, in spite of the difficulties, and recall some of what we had learned through revolutionary experience and in revolutionary action — these were the most important factors that saved us from demoralization.

"The other, equally important factor for a political prisoner is not to feel alone in his cell, in spite of the enemy's pressure; to know that there is the solidarity of his people and international solidarity and that this is a force that is superior to that of our common enemy, imperialism."

## Puerto Rican Prisoners

Havana TRICONTINENTAL in English No 115, 1979 pp 21-38

[Text]

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Three Puerto Rican patriots have been in prison for 25 years and a fourth for 29 years because of armed actions they carried out in order to achieve the legitimate aspirations of independence and freedom for their homeland.

In this issue dedicated to solidarity with all those in America who have been imprisoned for defending their political ideals, Tricontinental cannot fail to mention those who have served the longest sentences of all. So we offer our readers a version of the document presented by the Puerto Rican delegation to the 11th World Festival of Youth and Students at the International Tribunal held during that great youth event, a document that provides vivid proof of the continuous violation of these Puerto Rican revolutionaries' most basic rights throughout the long years of confinement and bad treatment in US prisons.

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I believe the US judicial system has violated international rights. We are prisoners of a liberation battle, and the enemy has no moral or political right to try us, according to international law. Our case should be taken to an international court. The United States tried us as civilian criminals, violating all recognized national and international rights in order to conceal our Puerto Rican people's right and mandate to legality.

The arrest, trial and continued imprisonment by the United States government of Puerto Rican patriots Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irvin Flores, Oscar Collazo and Andrés Figueroa Cordero (recently released) violate the norms governing international law.

The armed actions by the patriots in 1950 and 1954 were direct responses to the United States' illegal occupation of Puerto Rico. These actions were part of our people's long history of resistance to colonialism and exploitation. The prisoners were all members of a popular, organized political par-

ty, the Nationalist Party, which proclaimed Puerto Rico's complete independence. Under the direction of their leader, Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the nationalists took up arms to free their homeland from US domination. Each has a long history of militancy in the independence movement, and there is no doubt that they are all patriots devoted to the cause of their people's freedom.

The action by the patriot Oscar Collazo and the martyr Griselio Torresola came as a direct consequence of US military action in the 1950 campaign designed to wipe

out the Nationalist Party and the US attempt to make the anticolonial struggle appear to be a civil war. The 1954 attack was also a commando action to warn the US government and the world that the Puerto Rican people would continue fighting for their freedom, in spite of US efforts to destroy the independence movement and bury the colonial case of Puerto Rico. Both actions were continuations of the national liberation war the Puerto Rican people had been waging against US imperialism ever since 1898, when US troops invaded our land.

In spite of the clear aim of the patriots' actions, the US government tried, sentenced and imprisoned them as though they were common criminals of that country. Even today, after a quarter century of harsh imprisonment, the United States continues to maintain publicly that the Puerto Rican patriots are common criminals, deserving the same treatment as any low criminal or rapist, while, at the same time, it has subjected them to a special system of punishment and isolation precisely because of the role they played in the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle.

The US government has refused to recognize their status as prisoners of war or to grant any international rights or guarantees in treating the Puerto Rican prisoners and has generated a public campaign of hysteria, lies and slander against them in the US press. Using the anticommunist madness of the '50s, the mass media painted the nationalists as foreign terrorists, completely hiding the clear aim of their actions. The prisoners and their families were subjected to

continuous threats and interrogations. Collazo's wife and two young daughters were arrested for no reason at all, questioned for hours and accused of being Soviet agents.

The Puerto Rican prisoners were subjected to weeks of interrogation without legal advice and to constant threats and harassment from the moment they were arrested. They were charged with having committed common crimes. Collazo was accused of murder and the other four of assault with intent to kill. The authorities specifically ignored the possibility of charging the patriots under the statute prohibiting acts of rebellion and intrusion included in Volume XVIII of the US Penal Code. Of course, the accused were not allowed to demand that they be treated as prisoners of war or political prisoners before or during their trials, and all attempts to explain the nature and aim of their acts in the course of the trials were considered irrelevant.

Just before Collazo's trial began, a lawyer offered to join his defense and donate \$15 000 if Collazo would declare himself insane (later investigations proved the man to be a member of the US Federal Bureau of Investigations). Collazo rejected this obvious attempt to compromise his political convictions. Although Collazo and his court-appointed defense lawyer explained the political-social conditions that existed in Puerto Rico, the judge instructed the jury to ignore that evidence.

The lawyers tried to establish a defense based on a statement of insanity and mental incompetence,

a charge that the prisoners firmly rejected. They were also denied the translation of the court record of their trial, which was conducted totally in English except for the statements they themselves made, even though they understood very little English. Thus they were denied a significant part in their own defense. The sentence given the nationalists was designed to make them an example to all those opposed to US colonialism and to keep these young patriots in the dungeons of US imperialism for the rest of their lives. There was a deliberate attempt to bury them alive and silence the clamor for independence in a cruel and extraordinary way, using their sentence as punishment for a political act.

Each of them was sentenced to 15 years in prison for each of the five US Congressmen wounded in the shooting that occurred in the House of Representatives. The prisoners were condemned five times for the same thing, and although the average sentence for assault with intent to kill was four years in Washington, D.C. at that time, the patriots were given sentences of from 50 to 75 years.

Their trials and sentences violated all norms of international law; the patriots were not tried by an impartial and independent court, as guaranteed by Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and General Assembly Resolution 217-A, No. 3, of December 10, 1945, which was valid at the time they were tried. We might also cite similar guarantees in Article 85, No. 4, of the Additional Protocol of the Geneva Convention; Article 8 of the American

Convention on Human Rights; and Article U-7 of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Mankind.

For 80 years, the US courts have operated as part of the machinery to maintain US colonial domination over Puerto Rico. The patriots' actions were acts of war against the US government — including its judicial power — and, therefore, the US courts could in no way consider themselves to be impartial and independent in judging and punishing the actions of the accused. The courts refused to allow the patriots' political motivations to be considered — clearly demonstrating that they were incapable of judging them. The courts' refusal to hear the motivation the patriots had for their actions within the context of the Puerto Rican anticolonial struggle also deprived them of the possibility of acting in their own self-defense. The outcome of the trials was predetermined by the United States' imperial colonial relationship with its colony, Puerto Rico.

The repressive and barbarous sentences given the independence fighters also showed up the US legal system's prejudice and its role as imperialism's gendarme. The prisoners' sentences, which were much more severe than what should have been applied at the time their acts were committed, violated a number of agreements of international law. For more than two decades, the Puerto Rican nationalists have been subjected to violations of their rights while locked up in US prisons.

While claiming that the nationalists are not political prisoners, the



US government has initiated a high-level program and a special policy of punitive treatment and isolation designed to destroy their resistance and continued links with the struggle for Puerto Rico's independence. From the moment they were imprisoned in the United States, they were classified as special criminals and subjected to cruel and discriminatory treatment in open violation of international agreements on human rights, as stated in Articles 55 and 56 of the United Nations Charter.

Following their conviction and sentencing, the patriots were sent to the harshest and most repressive penal institutions in the United States. Rafael Cancel Miranda was sent to the notorious Alcatraz prison after having been brutally beaten by a prison guard in New York while awaiting trial on conspiracy charges. After six years in Alcatraz, he was sent to the Leavenworth maximum security prison and then to the prison that replaced Alcatraz: the infamous federal prison of Marion, Illinois.

The patriots Collazo, Flores and Figueroa Cordero were held in Leavenworth, Kansas, except for the period that Figueroa Cordero spent in the Prince, Missouri, prison hospital.

The patriot Lolita Lebrón has been held in the general maximum security prison for women in Alderson, West Virginia. Imprisoned for more than two decades, far from their homeland, they have also been subjected to long periods of special, destructive and segregated confinement to try to isolate them still further from their native land and contact with the independence struggle.

In addition to being placed in solitary confinement for prolonged periods in the Leavenworth prison, patriot Rafael Cancel Miranda and 100 other prisoners were sent to a special behavior modification unit in the Marion prison for 26 months, in reprisal for a peaceful work stoppage protesting the brutal beating of a prisoner by the guards. Although 70 percent of the prisoners were then transferred out of the center, the prison officials refused to apply the same treatment to Cancel Miranda. Only after a court order had been issued establishing the fact that the prisoners had been subjected to cruel and unusual punishment were Miranda and some of the other prisoners transferred from that behavior modification center. While he was there, Cancel Miranda was stripped of his personal possessions and denied exercise and bathing privileges.

The patriots Figueroa Cordero, Irvin Flores and Oscar Collazo have been subjected to long periods of solitary confinement in the Leavenworth, Kansas, special control unit simply because they were classified as special criminals. Between 1972 and 1974, they were confined to the special segregation unit where their right to mingle among themselves and with other prisoners was severely restricted.

Prison officials have used extremely discriminatory and repressive measures in denying the nationalist patriots the right to receive visits, mail and publications, as part of the US government's policy of isolation and special punishment. Unlike all other federal prisoners, the nationalist patriots have been denied visits

even from their immediate families, who cannot easily afford the long and costly trip from Puerto Rico. The patriot Irvin Flores Rodriguez didn't have a single visitor during the first 13 months he was in prison. The US government prohibited all visits from persons with whom they had had some political relationship prior to their imprisonment or from anyone they hadn't known before their arrest, thus eliminating those visitors who were most likely to be interested and active in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence or in the campaign to free the patriots. And, even when their immediate relatives could afford a visit, they were subjected to various delays and degradations and forced to cut short their visits.

In May, 1976, a special regulation was announced in the Marion prison whereby the wife of the patriot Cancel Miranda, who had been visiting him for more than two decades, was subjected to a degrading strip search every time she went to see him. In July, 1972, after traveling all the way from Puerto Rico to Marion, Illinois, she found her visit limited to one hour, in the presence of a prison guard. During a subsequent visit, she and her husband had to talk to each other by telephone, with a glass panel between them.

When relatives come from Puerto Rico to see one of the prisoners, they aren't allowed to talk to any of the others. For example, Oscar Collazo's daughter was denied permission to see Irvin Flores and Andrés Figueroa Cordero — two of her father's closest comrades — thus preventing her from bringing firsthand news to their families

and friends when she got back to Puerto Rico.

Even visits by priests and lawyers have been selectively and illegally restricted and denied. The Catholic Bishop Monsignor Parrilla, a prestigious priest in Puerto Rico and a friend of the patriots' relatives, was denied permission to visit Cancel Miranda. Bishop Parrilla's visits to Figueroa Cordero, Collazo and Flores were limited to 15 minutes in the prison warden's office, speaking in English instead of in Spanish, his native language.

Several times when the Party lawyers came from Puerto Rico, they were refused entrance to the prison or had to wait endlessly until they were allowed to make a brief visit. Comrade Emilio Soler, lawyer for our nationalist prisoners' defense committee, was not allowed to visit the patriots Collazo and Flores in Kansas as part of the planned itinerary of a trip he had made from Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, the patriots have had periodic and regular "visits" from representatives of US repressive agencies such as the FBI, the Secret Service and the CIA. The agents constantly try to interrogate the patriots about their political ideas. The US government has also constantly restricted the nationalists' right to receive news and literature concerning their homeland and the independence struggle. Publications containing news about the Puerto Rican independence movement and the struggle of other peoples for freedom and general liberation have been confiscated — or sometimes have been delivered after a long delay.

The nature and scope of the vio-

lations of the Puerto Rican patriots' human rights can be clearly judged from an analysis of patriot Andrés Figueroa Cordero's case.

In 1971, the patriot Figueroa Cordero began having rectal hemorrhaging. Instead of examining him and diagnosing what was wrong, they told him he had hemorrhoids. Following that diagnosis, he was illegally held incommunicado in reprisal for a work stoppage in the prison. For two weeks, 24 hours a day, he was shut up in a cell with four other men. The cell was dirty and filled with excrement. For three months, the prisoner Figueroa Cordero was kept in constant solitary confinement without any medical attention, in spite of the fact that he was bleeding almost daily. When outside public pressure forced his release from solitary, he was transferred to the prison hospital in Prince, Missouri, for examination. There, for the first time, it was discovered that he was suffering from cancer of the colon.

After two years of treatment for hemorrhoids, in line with the conclusions the prison doctors had reached, it was discovered that he had cancer and that it had developed to the point where immediate surgery was required to take out the intestine and replace it with a tube in his side for evacuating. Because of incorrect and negligent

treatment and diagnosis, the operation came too late; the cancer had metastasized, and Figueroa had to be operated on again, this time on both lungs. Figueroa's disease had reached the point where it was no longer curable, but the United States government still refused to release him from prison, stating that his cancer was no longer active. Only after an inoperable tumor had admittedly appeared in his left lung and the US government thought the patriot had only a few weeks to live did it release him.

Due to his strength and will, he kept on living, free and active, in his beloved Puerto Rico,<sup>1</sup> but his health had been seriously undermined by the US government's criminal negligence and indifference to his illness.

The US government has also waged a campaign of harassment and repression against those who are most active in the struggle to free the nationalist prisoners. A US Grand Jury ordered Comrade Nelson Canals, head of the Puerto Rican Committee for the Freedom of the Nationalist Patriots, to produce a record of his travels; and the FBI has pointed the finger at him in the US media as someone who should be investigated for

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<sup>1</sup> On February 18, 1979, there was news that his state of health was extremely poor and that he might not recover from his new crisis. He died in Aguada, his hometown, on March 7.

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throwing bombs — all because of his activity on behalf of the freedom of the patriot prisoners. In addition, six distinguished members of the National Committee for the freedom of the four Puerto Rican prisoners of war were called before the Chicago Grand Jury to be investigated as alleged bomb throwers.

The United States — especially under the administration of President James Carter — presents itself to the world as a protector of human rights, yet four fighters for anticolonial freedom have spent more than two decades il-

legally imprisoned in the United States. The patriots' actions were guided by feelings of deep dedication to their homeland's independence, feelings shared by Pedro Albizu Campos, Ho Chi Minh and other great liberators; nevertheless, these four Puerto Rican nationalists imprisoned in US jails have been subjected to long years of isolation and punitive treatment. We urge the world to intercede for the freedom of our patriots, so that daylight reaches the darkness of their cells and they can return to their homeland and join in their people's deafening cry: Long live free Puerto Rico!

#### Lolita Lebron

She was born in the mountainous agricultural area of Lares on November 19, 1919. Her father, Gonzalo Lebron, was a farm administrator. Her mother, Rafaela Soto, divided her time between housework and farm work.

Lolita Lebron moved to New York when she was very young and worked as a dressmaker. She joined the Nationalist Party and was a firm follower of maestro Pedro Albizu Campos' principles. During the late '40s and early 50's she was very active in the New York branch of the Nationalist Party. In 1954, she was appointed Nationalist Party delegate in the United States and then led the attack on the US Congress.

Lolita Lebron is imprisoned in the Alderson, West Virginia, Federal Industrial Institution for Women. She is an inspired poet who writes verses filled with patriotic fervor, some of which have been published in the book SANDALO EN LA CELDA (Sandalwood in the Cell).

#### Rafael Cancel Miranda

Son of a hard-working nationalist businessman from Mayaguez, he became an activist in the Nationalist Party in his hometown at a very early age. He joined the Cadet Corps of the Republic, in which he always showed leadership qualities. When he was 17 years old, he was sent to Tallahassee Federal Prison on a two-year sentence for being one of the first opponents

of compulsory military service. Years later, he took part in the attack on the US Congress. He is now in the Marion, Illinois, prison, where he is an active leader for prisoners' rights.

Because of his leadership qualities, the prison officials have given him the worst possible treatment, subjecting him to more than 17 months of solitary confinement during his last seven years in jail.

He is the author of *LUCHA E IDEARIO DE UN PUERTORRIQUENO* (A Puerto Rican's Struggle and Philosophy), a book of verse and prose.

#### Irvin Flores

He was born into a humble family in Cabo Rojo and, when he was still very young, joined the Nationalist Party, as a member of its Cadet Corps of the Republic. Later, he went to New York, where he worked as a tailor and became an outstanding organizer for better working conditions. He took part in the 1954 attack on the US Congress with Lolita, Andres and Rafael.

Irvin is now 52 years old and has been one of the most isolated of the Puerto Rican prisoners. During his first 13 months in prison, he was not allowed a single visit.

#### Oscar Collazo

Oscar Collazo is the youngest of 15 brothers and sisters. He was born in the town of Florida in 1914. When he was five years old, his father died. He went to live with his older brother and became a farm worker like his father. As the US sugar companies began to expand, his family became poorer and poorer. He went to New York to look for a job and worked there as a dishwasher, cook and hat maker.

Aware of US exploitation and subjection of his homeland, he joined the Nationalist Party when he was 18 years old and was later elected chairman of the New York branch and alternate delegate to the United Nations.

On November 1, 1950, he and Griselio Torresola attacked President Harry Truman's residence, for which he was given a life sentence and sent to the Leavenworth, Kansas, prison. He has written revolutionary articles and poems.

At this moment, Oscar Collazo has spent more time in prison than any other political prisoner in the western hemisphere.

#### Andres Figueroa Cordero

Born in Aguada, he worked in the fields with his father until he was 12 years old and joined the Nationalist Party in his hometown. In 1954, he



took part in the attack on the US Congress, along with the other nationalists. Fugueroa developed cancer while he was in prison in the United States, but it was not so diagnosed until two years later. After this, he had three operations.

He was released because of his illness, and on October 6, 1977, he returned to Puerto Rico, where he was welcomed as a beloved patriot. Fugueroa Cordero died on March 7, 1979.

#### The Actions and the Time

The actions of the Puerto Rican nationalists should be understood within the context of the United States' colonization of Puerto Rico. In 1950, the US Congress passed Public Law 600, which permitted Puerto Rico to draw up its own Constitution, providing, of course, it did not jeopardize the colonial laws that governed the island. To suppress the increasing opposition to the US government, the US National Guard, aided by the colonial police, launched attacks against leaders and members of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico, whose aim was independence.

In 1950, the United States government was conducting a witch-hunt, irrationally aimed at persecuting and discrediting Communists, trade union leaders, professors and anyone else who took a progressive position. This was the year and the atmosphere in which Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were sentenced to death.

On October 30, 1950, the police and the National Guard threatened to wipe out the Nationalist Party. All over the island, the Puerto Rican patriots resisted but were quickly repressed. Hundreds were wounded, many were killed and thousands were arrested.

On November 1, 1950, as part of the revolutionary action against US domination, Oscar Collazo and Griselio Torresola, both members of the Nationalist Party, made an armed attack on President Truman's temporary residence, Blair House. Torresola and one of the President's guards were killed, and Collazo was wounded. He was tried and sentenced to death, but, due to international pressure, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

During the wave of drastic repression on the island, the US government held a referendum on the new Puerto Rican Constitution. Even though 48 percent of the eligible voters boycotted the referendum, the Constitution was adopted and served as a base for the US government's statement that the Puerto Ricans had freely chosen the status of Associated Free State by an overwhelming majority. In December, 1953, the United Nations removed Puerto Rico from the list of territories lacking their own government.

It was expected that the 10th Pan American Conference, scheduled to be held in Caracas, Venezuela, on March 1, 1954, would take similar action.

That same day, Lolita Lebron, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andres Figueroa and Irvin Flores fired onto the floor of the House of Representatives from the visitors' gallery, while they unfurled a Puerto Rican flag and shouted, "Long live free Puerto Rico!" Five Congressmen were slightly wounded. The four Puerto Ricans were arrested and treated like criminals, each of them arraigned on five charges of assault with intent to kill.

#### Southern Cone-Latin America

Havana TRICONTINENTAL in English No 115, 1979 pp 39-51

[Article by Orlando Contreras: "How Many Victims of Torture Fit on the Head of a Pin: 3761 or 9785?"]

[Text]

No writer, artist, intellectual or student can fulfill his mission of broadening the horizons of the soul when the armed forces of a gendarmerie state control them with its boots. Neither the manual worker nor the intellectual worker can remain indifferent to the fate of the Chilean people and their right to express their hopes. America's whole history is the past and present struggle of a world that seeks the triumph of the soul in freedom. Having tasted freedom, we cannot stoop to servitude in this country. It is better to teach the peasant, the worker, the woman and the student to be free, so their dignity is respected.

GABRIELA MISTRAL

I put it to you frankly: when you have read reports that speak of 7000 political prisoners in Uruguay, 2500 people who have disappeared in Chile or more than 5000 people killed by individuals in Argentina, haven't you thought the figures might have been exaggerated? I have.

And, sometimes, don't you feel doubtful about everything that goes beyond our incorporated criteria of rationality — and, therefore, of credibility — when you hear that men have been skinned alive, like cattle, in Argentina; that men and women have been killed in the "submarine" (one of the thousand and one torture techniques used in Uruguay, which consists of submerging the victim headfirst in water and detritus and pulling him out as he's on the point of drowning, then beginning all over again); that rats have been placed in women's vaginas; and that Chileans have been thrown into abandoned caves and mines and left to

die — a practice that a Nazi criminal introduced in Rome?

Don't you, perhaps, lose a little of your feeling of surprise and disgust?

Or maybe it's just that, since it's shown on TV, torture has become a part of daily life?

This may be what is happening.

We are willing to concede the benefit of the doubt. May all the Cartesianism that has been grafted onto this fervid world be concentrated and on the alert. May mathematical logic and the purest reason sweep the road clear and doubt throw down the gauntlet to seal the truth.

For two French socialist parliamentarians who made an exhaustive investigation of the situation, there are 5000 — not 7000 — political prisoners in Uruguay. That is the conclusion reached by Dep-

ity Pierre Guidoni and Senator Bernard Parmentier: only 5000 political prisoners in Uruguay. Of course, since the total population of the country is only 2 800 000, the per capita ratio is quite eloquent — especially if you admit that, since the military coup five years ago, "50 000 Uruguayans have been imprisoned and half of them savagely tortured," according to a detailed study made by the two French legislators.

Then, a photo you once saw in some pamphlet or on some solidarity poster of a hooded, naked man being given electric shock immediately comes to mind, and, with the firm voice of those who do not lie, it reminds us:

They kept me hanging — with the tips of my toes barely touching the ground — for one, two, three, who knows how many hours. Now I rant under the arches of the great slave barracks of "The Inferno." All around, there are others like me, lying on the floor, "gathering" strength for the next session in the torture chambers that function above.

"The military group that seized power," explain the French legislators who estimate that there are 5000 — not 7000 — political prisoners in Uruguay, "applied the doctrine of 'national security' that the United States put into effect during the cold war." However, they go on to say, "No other repressive force has ever been so brutal as this one or reached this level of absolute horror and technological sophistication."

... the desperate sensation of drowning; they submerge my head in a vat, and, then, when they allow me to raise it, the sensation of asphyxiation continues because of the rubber mask I'm wearing that won't let the air in or the water out.

Some claim a much higher figure for the number of tortured in Uruguay, but let's not go to extremes that clash with our cold and necessary rationality. Let us admit nothing that doesn't filter through the fine sieve of doubt: only 25 000 tortured.... "savagely tortured."

From the submarine I go to the hook. At the mercy of the rope

again, my wrists joined and tied behind, arms pulled back and up by the cord. When the squeak of the pulley is no longer audible, my toenails are off the ground. My body begins to sway.... But this time it's not only the suspension: two electrodes begin their discharge on my testicles, legs, chest, neck, again the testicles, neck, legs, chest, over and over again....

A methodically rational person will ask at this point, Why? What for? And there is no adequate way to answer, within the normal character of cogitation as the self-evident expression of the thinking person and the principle of all other evidence.

A Uruguayan newspaper pragmatically revealed the socioeconomic essence of this aberrant conduct for those who believe there are inviolable human values but are possessed of a cold coherence when they believe they are facing a limited situation, that there is a potentiality without any return to the strength of the masses — except that all laws; all norms; all precepts; all ethics of coexistence; and, as in the Inquisition, all devices of the ideological pillar of backward feudal medievalism try to straighten out (or, rather, twist) the course of history with the brand, the rack, the winch, the fagot: public punishment.

First subversion had to be defeated and order reestablished, as the essential base for stimulating development in security.... Then, on those bases, major economic reform was begun by engineer Vegg Villagas, Minister of the Economy and Finance.... and continued by his successor, accountant Valentin Arismendi, the present Minister of the Economy and Finance, who has his own well-defined ideas.

(*La Mañana*, Montevideo, August 12, 1978)

The "subversives" in Uruguay, those who had to be "defeated" so order could be reestablished (using everything, including torture, of course), were the Tupamaros guerrillas, the Communists, the Socialists, the Christian Democrats, the members of the United Action Groups (GAU), those who broke with the traditional parties (Blanco and Colorado), the progressive intellectuals (even when they weren't

members of any party), the workers who belonged to the National Workers' Organization (CNT) — whether or not they were politically affiliated — the university and high school students and the powerful trade unions. The united effort of the democratic, popular forces went beyond political parties, opening a fan from center to left, organically expressed in the Broad Front, which became the third electoral force in the country in the November, 1971, election. The Broad Front emerged with that kind of an electoral swell, and there was nothing to prevent it from becoming a powerful option within a Presidential term or two, in view of the crisis of the system and the series of circumstantial crises, plus the administrative corruption and the overt rise of the military as the oligarchy's armed branch.

The possibility of a people's triumph, as had occurred in Chile in 1970, that would nationalize alienated wealth and create a powerful state sector in the economy as a prelude to a slow transition toward socialism unleashed — also as in Chile — all the repressive power of imperialism and the domestic reaction, which, as in the trans-Andean country, used the Armed Forces — the institutionalized apparatus of repression — but went beyond all earlier institutionalization and rode roughshod over the country's most treasured and deeply-rooted traditions. Thus, with barely any interregnum, the country was dragged from tolerance, respect and anarchist pride to concentration camps, torture and the generalization of repressive forms of an unmistakably fascist nature.

The coup was pulled in Chile to avoid the consolidation of the Popular Unity government that had taken substantial steps to rescue the nation's wealth, to redistribute income and to apply a program of social orientation that sought to lay the bases for the future transition to socialism; in Uruguay, the coup was pulled to prevent a similar economic and social process with national characteristics from being initiated.

#### And in Argentina?

During the government of de facto President Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, in the early '70s, it was decided to put an end to the military governments that had amassed a considerable collection of inep-

titudes, corruption and repression without dynamizing the economy or managing to ease the pressure on the social and political tensions. Thus, in a generalized way, there was forged the great national agreement that permitted the legal resurrection to political life of Perónism — which the oligarchy and the Armed Forces thought they had buried 18 years before.

But the great agreement was based on the presumption — we will assume tacit — of a populist, vulgar and tamely collaborationist (in terms of the class struggle) Perónism in a country with a quantitatively numerous and qualitatively organized proletariat.

Things didn't turn out that way, however. During the short, transitional Presidency of Héctor Cámpora, political measures were adopted in both the domestic and foreign spheres that broke with this scheme, and, when Perón assumed the Presidency, it was too late to lull spirits that had been disturbed for decades. Perón had managed to keep a flame of hope alight during his 18 years in exile, but the effort and the years consumed his wick: the old chieftain could become enraged over not being esteemed, but he couldn't put his hosts on the right track, as in the prodigal years of the Eva Duarte de Perón Foundation and of the trade union-party apparatus. Gardel's contention that "Twenty years is nothing" is questionable and only figuratively true — except for those who are 20. And they, the 20-year-olds, did not go for tangos and advice. Neither did many of the others, because this was a class rather than generational matter. Perón governed neither from the Pink House nor from Olivos — only from the top of a monument-myth that tediously hurried to rebuild his image in order to immortalize him in history. The necessary Perón-Eva myth, from the mid-'40s and early '50s, sought to be reincarnated in the Perón-Isabel myth, and, while López Rega, his secretary and minister, summoned up ghosts, the military called their men together; the CIA, its agents — and the people, their vanguard. Then Perón died. López Rega beat on the feet of the old man's body and called in vain for his spirit to return. Some viewed this scene with their mouths open; others were nauseated; and still others wanted to hurry things along, because there was no time to be lost. Ma-

## THE HOMELAND IMPRISONED

*HOMELAND of my tenderness and pain,  
homeland of love, fresh as a sparkling spa,  
now your tricolor flags bleed and strain  
on the barbed wire of Pisagua.*

*You live, homeland, beyond these fears,  
and your heart burns with your people's drama:  
now, among jailers' and traitors' sneers;  
then, within the walls of Rancagua.*

*But you will emerge in the air and the light,  
emerge from the grief of this sorrowful blight  
and this springtime of the shattered dream*

*to walk in the dignity of your right,  
to sing aloud and feel the might  
of your homeland free, your people supreme.*

Pablo Neruda  
(Translation: Jane McManus)

ria Estela Martínez-Isabel Perón started to walk, then, as if in an echo chamber and became the foolish prisoner of a blind destiny that she neither chose nor was prepared to modify.

How to calm the ever greater popular tide? How prevent the rapid transformation of a myth into class consciousness? How once more profit from the beatitude of order, a sine qua non for progress? A coup d'état.

Lanusse's project of the great agreement tried to break up Perónism and turn it into a party of class harmony in order to achieve the long-sought social peace. If this should fail — the military like to

draw up strategies with multiple options — a garrison policy could be applied again, though without the threat of the Perónist myth because — as a rational simplification had it — Perón and Perónism had had a second chance on this earth and had muffed it.

Both these options failed: bourgeois positivism's order and progress were not achieved, and Perónism failed to provide light without heat, as an ignis fatuus. To the contrary, there was a sharpening of the class contradictions in the interior of the country and of the contradictions between national interests and imperialism; Perónism, now demystified, dropped most of its populism and turned classist.



The Army, confronted with a situation that was much more complex and that had more active forces than this brief résumé can cover, resorted to means never before used on such a large scale or with such fury: a war without quarter against the people. The cost in lives? "As many people should die in Argentina as may be necessary to restore peace in the country" — General Jorge Videla, present President of the nation, when he was the head of the Army, in October, 1975. Die. Die, but how?

Electric shock on my arms, hands and thighs and near my mouth whenever I cried or prayed.... Every 20 minutes, they opened the door and told me they were going to make mincemeat of me with the saw that I could hear.

Die. Die, but how?

Perhaps the way Mario Amaya, a former radical deputy, was finished off. He was a man who believed in the law and in his rights and insisted that they be respected. They beat him to death.

How? Maybe like Jorge Lizaso, who was skinned alive.

Seventy people were shot after the bomb went off in the Federal Security building; 55, in reply to the blowing up of the Police Department in La Plata; 30, for the attack on the Ministry of Defense; 40, in the New Year's massacre that followed the death of Colonel Castellano; and 19, after the explosion that destroyed the Commissariat of Ciudadela — just some of the 1200 executions in 300 alleged combats in which your opponent had no wounded and the security forces had no casualties.

Is this true? Who can you ask? The author of this article?

It's impossible to ask Rodolfo Walsh to be more precise, for he disappeared in Buenos Aires on March 25, 1977. It is nearly certain that we will never be able to ask him to tell us the details, because the hangman has surely silenced even the details of his own torture. You say he was a brilliant journalist, a talented writer? Jorge Massera is a mathematician of international renown, the pride of Uruguayan science, but this was no obstacle to the

Uruguayan military men who tortured him and now keep him in prison in conditions that endanger his life. To the international of crime, prestige and talent are mirrors without mercury, useless things that have no place in its system of accounts: fascism has a gloomy aspect.

It is said that there are 15 000 political and trade union prisoners in Argentina. Isn't that a little high? Might it not be a bit exaggerated? Possibly. Let's concede the benefit of the doubt: there are not 15 000 political prisoners. How many, then? Twelve thousand? Ten thousand? Seven thousand? How many thousand?

And those who have simply disappeared? It is stated that national and international solidarity organizations have lists of 20 000 people who have "disappeared" in Argentina. The lists are like provincial telephone directories. Thousands of names and precise data.

If we insist on rationality and precision, we should define our concepts clearly. What is a "disappeared" person? The dictionary I have at hand — a *Pequeño Larousse Illustrado*, 1964 edition — doesn't include the term. It does, however, contain the verb: to stop appearing or being seen, and it offers a number of synonyms: evaporate, fade away, be eclipsed, vanish.

The "disappeared" person in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay is, at the same time, something concrete and incorporeal. He is someone who was seen and then stopped appearing in his work, in his neighborhood, in his home and in his bed, leaving not a trace, except that he was picked up by armed men who either identified themselves as police or who used official cars. The relatives of a "disappeared" person go from military garrisons to police stations and back again, courteously asking if, by chance, the "disappeared" person should happen to be there; they go the rounds of the hospitals, courts and ministries; knock on the doors of churches and international organizations; write letters; and, when permitted to do so, check out the anonymous corpses in the cold storage vaults of the morgues, impossible to take flowers to the tomb of a "disappeared" person, because he doesn't have one. Impossible to weep for him, because he may still be alive. A "disappeared" person may be an

"appearance," the specter of the dead.

Ricardo Lagos is a "disappeared" person. He was arrested in June, 1975, in Chile, but his captors turned him from a political prisoner into a "disappeared" person. The former is a harsh and accusing reality; the latter, a sad wait. A political prisoner said he had spoken with him for a few minutes during a recess in the torture, in Villa Grimaldi. This was at the beginning of 1976. Three years have passed since then. There is no news of Ricardo Lagos. He may have suffered the same fate as his father, mother and brother, all murdered by the fascist Junta.

Carlos Contreras Maluje is another "disappeared" person. He disappeared on November 3, 1976, in front of nearly 30 people who saw he was beaten up and then pushed into a Fiat car, license plate either EG 558 or EG 338, of Santiago, Chile. The "disappearance" occurred on Nataniel Street, between Coquimbo and Aconcagua, where people heard Contreras cry out his identity and request that his parents, in the Maluje Pharmacy in Concepción, be informed. He remains "disappeared," like Victor Díaz, Exequiel Ponce, Edgardo Enriquez, Luis Durán, Patricio Vergara, Mario Zamorano and 2500 other Chileans.

There is no special age for "disappearing" — any more than for dying. Julio Castro, a distinguished Uruguayan professor and journalist who for years was editor, managing editor and subdirector of the Uruguayan weekly *Marcha*, left his house in Montevideo on August 1, 1977, and "disappeared." He was 69 years old at the time. His whereabouts are still unknown.

Ana María Gallardo was 15 years old on July 8, 1976, when she "disappeared" during a raid on her home in Buenos Aires. Juan Carlos Marín, Hugo Tosso and Pablo Dubcovsky were all 17 years old on July 7, 1976, when they went to the movies — and "disappeared." Their whereabouts are still unknown. Benicio Villarreal, Argentina's Under Secretary of Education at the time, perhaps offered a clue to deciphering this cruel riddle when he said, "Precocious subversion can't be tolerated, either."

Amaral García may have had a different view of his "disappearance." He was arrested with his parents — Uruguayans like him — on November 8, 1974, in Buenos

Aires. The three disappeared, but the bodies of his parents — Floreal García and Mirtha Yolanda Hernández — were found on the outskirts of Montevideo along with the remains of three other people last December 20. Amaral has not reappeared. He was 3 years old at the time of his arrest.

When a murder is a "disappearance," a shooting without trial in the open air is a "battle" and a kidnapping is a "procedure," it is not surprising that a political prisoner should be a "transient" — the term applied to those interned in the "Freedom" (so called by its commandant) Concentration Camp, 40 kilometers from Montevideo, where 1342 political prisoners are locked up in 7 cell blocks containing 500 cells. "There are no prisoners here; they're just transients," Jorge Olsina, the man with the macabre sense of humor, said without the slightest embarrassment to a group of journalists who were given restricted access to the concentration camp.

Just as the prisoners are "transients," so the jails are "hotels." And, of course, anyone who stays in a hotel should pay for his lodging. The "cost of lodging" that the Uruguayan military collected for six years of torture and imprisonment of Flavia Schilling, a young Brazilian, has come to nearly \$15 000. At least, that is what has been spent in Brazil to pay for Flavia's "lodging." Six years of torture and solitary confinement have caused "advanced psychic disturbances with progressive psychological deterioration due to her isolation in jail," according to Decio Freitas, her Brazilian lawyer.

In mid-October of last year, the Supreme Military Court of Uruguay released a couple and an odontologist, crediting them with having completed their prison terms before being brought to trial. As an appendix to the sentence, it placed an embargo on all the goods belonging to the "liberated" three until they paid for the "lodging" that the Uruguayan government had provided for them in its prisons — pardon, hotels.

How many political prisoners are there in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile? How many people have been tortured? How many have disappeared? How many thousands? As long as even one remains, does it matter, in denouncing the hangmen, whether there are 6742 or 9217 or 23 500?

## The Four Degenerals

From the darkness they took away shelter;  
they whipped up a wind with fangs,  
tailored silence into absence,  
removed the dignity from death,  
loosed the claws of sleep.  
And, what is more: they cast a shadow  
over the stars,  
silenced the rose and the fern,  
preached death and an end to dreams,  
allowing only the scaffold of fear.  
They went further: they legislated  
friendship and the choice of words,  
enjoined the helping hand,  
introduced into the most intimate verbal conjugation,  
embittered the host and the wine.  
But that wasn't enough, so they argued with  
syllogisms of grief,  
metaphores of gunpowder and electric shock,  
municipal geopolitical scholars.  
They went further and crucified  
the cross, poisoned the dawn  
and made man thrice deny himself.

Look at them, because they're still invading  
the streets of life.  
They're still there, with trumpets of steel;  
they're still devouring Sundays;  
look at them in their secretive alchemy;  
they're still there, and they're building a pyre without petals,  
willfully,  
tirelessly,  
a weary and meaningless death,  
like a clock that doesn't tell time,  
a step that doesn't walk,  
a ship that doesn't sail.  
Death on the waiting gallows;  
but they're still there;  
look at them;  
there they are in my homeland,  
silent tree,  
stubborn seed,  
Chile.

Fernando Quilodran  
(Translation: Jane McManus)

Havana TRICONTINENTAL in English No 115, 1979 pp 52-64

[Article by Talia Carol: "A Cry From Captivity"]

[Text] Now, right now, someone in Nicaragua, El Salvador or Guatemala is screaming under torture. *That person is a political prisoner.*

It is a cry that falls on deaf ears, for the sadistic hired assassins go grimly about their business. It is a cry forced through clenched teeth that goes beyond the prison walls and is heard by receptive ears, perhaps thousands of kilometers away. It is a cry like the glance that sees through thick hoods and blindfolds to call forth a responsive glance.

This cry contains a denunciation of what the people are suffering and a warning to the enemy. It is a cry that will be echoed and taken up all over the world.

### **WHY ARE THERE POLITICAL PRISONERS?**

Why do teen-aged students, peasants, workers and professionals consciously risk falling into the cruel hands of the regime? It is common to see how the personages of the repressive apparatus in Central America, which includes these three countries, try to justify the violation of human rights and accuse the people of engaging in "violence."

By "violence," they mean the victims' association in trade union, farmers' and student organizations and the peaceful demonstrations and strikes they carry out to demand respect for their rights.

For example, when the October, 1978, general strike was called in Guatemala against the doubling of urban transportation fares, military and police units attacked the strikers, leaving a toll of 40 dead, hundreds of wounded and dozens of strikers arrested — most of whom were added to the list of those who have "disappeared."

The massacre of Panzós, in mid-1978, is typical of the method the Guatemalan military regime uses in the rural areas, where more than half of the people live. When a highway was put through near the town to a mine owned by a US company, the value of the neighboring land went up. Large landowners and high-ranking officers of the National Guard forcibly evicted hundreds of families that had owned their little farms up until then. The farmers got together and set off for the City Hall to seek redress from the authorities for the eviction. There, they were met with bursts of machine-gun fire by a combined force of soldiers and private policemen hired by the large landowners — who, after killing dozens of people, ran after the survivors. Many of the group managed to escape into the mountains, from which they cannot return. Others were trapped and tortured to make them inform on the people who organized the protest — and, later, were murdered and their bodies displayed publicly as a grim warning to others.

On March 17, 1978, combined forces of the National Police, Rural Police and National Guard, together with agents of the Salvadoran political police, attacked a demonstration of over 400 peasants in the capital of El Salvador who were going to the Bank of Agricultural Development to

ask for a reduction in land rents, fertilizer and insecticide prices and for better credit systems. The police agents used their automatic weapons, and they were backed up by several helicopters, whose crews strafed the crowd with machine guns. Twenty peasants were killed, many more were wounded and dozens were captured — many of whom "disappeared." San Salvador was occupied by military forces to keep the people from protesting.

One week later, armed contingents of the Nationalist Democratic Organization (ORDEN), one of the dictatorship's paramilitary groups; plain-clothes guards; and district patrols went after the peasants who belonged to the Union of Rural Workers and the Christian Federation of Peasants in more than 14 rural towns in the department of Cuscatlán. The maneuver included invading the zones of San Pedro Perulapán, San Martín, Cojutepeque, Cinquera and other places whose populations were militarily besieged under the pretext of trying to contain a supposed uprising. These agricultural workers who were captured and interred in hidden prisons show the path of liberation.

Almost none of the peasants who enter the concentration camps of Nicaragua get out alive. Río Blanco has an experimental torture laboratory, run with the assistance of experts from the United States, Brazil and Vietnam (those who fled from Saigon). At the Waslala concentration camp, the prisoners are kept in communal latrines, submerged in mud holes up to their necks, or piled one on top of another — women, old people and children included. Even though the National Guard accuses the families that are arrested of belonging to or having cooperated with the Sandinist National Liberation Front (FSLN), most of them are really only peasants who have refused to sell their land to high-ranking officers in the repressive body.

The women struggle alongside the men, but, when the women are arrested or kidnapped, they are inevitably subjected to an extra torture: rape. In the interrogation cells, the women prisoners are stripped and hooded and are exhibited to groups of officers, many of whom gratify their sick lusts with them. They are even given electric shocks in their vaginas.

Maria Castil, a peasant member of the FSLN, is just one of thousands of such cases. A patrol arrested her in Castilla, the district where she lived, when she was seven months pregnant. She was taken through Yaosca, Caño Negro, Cerro Grande and Manceras districts as a warning to others. In each of these garrisons, the guards raped her, one after another, until she lost consciousness. Finally, they took her to Cuscatlán, where they slit open her belly.

Alike in their aims of merciless exploitation of the people, combined with protection for the large landowners, bourgeoisie and transnationals, the three regimes maintain themselves in power through the medieval bestiality of their inquisitorial techniques and Washington's financial, military and political support.

The same panorama may be seen in Nicaragua, which has been ruled by the Somoza dynasty for more than 40 years; El Salvador, that has been



controlled by a military oligarchy since 1944 — one now headed by General Carlos Humberto Romero — and Guatemala, where the tyranny's armed hordes, led by General Lucas García, have split into two rival camps, which are contesting the "right" to oppress the people. Invariably, each of these governments turns all its ire against the leaders of the people's organizations and those who help and/or follow them, making examples of as many of them as they get their hands on. These heroes, even now, are crowded into jails and improvised dungeons, with no records kept, so as to hide the fact that they have "disappeared."

## **THE KIDNAPPED**

It was close to 1 p.m. on Sunday, February 26, 1978. Many young people were running across the grass between the innings of a baseball game so as to talk with the players or with the fans at the Carlos Iván Hueck Field, in the Monimbó neighborhood, in Masaya, Nicaragua.

Suddenly, several National Guard jeeps filled with agents carrying automatic rifles and machine guns pulled up. One of the first people to see them was Miguel Díaz Vázquez, a 26-year-old shoemaker. Along with some others, he managed to run with incredible speed to some houses in the neighborhood. Meanwhile, some of the guards spread out over the field, surrounding the young people, and others went after those who had managed to get away.

Manuel de Jesús Ruiz, a 26-year-old door-to-door salesman, saw a military helicopter coming close. A guard struck him in the stomach with the butt of his machine gun and, helped by another guard in uniform, threw him on the ground and stomped on him to make him knuckle under and keep him from getting away. Thus immobilized, with his enemies' hands gripping him, he saw the helicopter descend and land on the field near the Los Sabogales Canteen.

The guards struck viciously with their rifle butts at anybody who tried to move, so as to keep all of them on the ground. When some of the young people jumped up and tried to escape, they were shot down. In the midst of the confusion, some agents went among the young people, obviously with the intention of picking up certain ones they were after. Two policemen grabbed Domingo Ruiz Cajina, a 15-year-old shoemaker, by the arms and, when the boy refused to walk, dragged him to the helicopter. Other guards forced their way into the home of Miguel Jerónimo Machado, where Miguel Díaz Vázquez was hiding. Paying no attention to the family's protests, they handcuffed him and pushed him out, beating him the while — after threatening the others and accusing them of protecting "criminals."

When Miguel Díaz got to the helicopter, he found Manuel de Jesús already there. The door was closed, and the helicopter took off.

Mission completed, the guards got back in their jeeps and drove away. Several people who had bullet wounds or had been beaten were left on the field. Some Red Cross people who had been taking part in the game took the wounded away with the help of those who managed to stand up.

Somebody found Manuel de Jesús' bloodied cap. Everybody witnessed the event.

The relatives of the kidnapped victims, convinced that the authorities in Masaya would always keep the truth from them, went to Managua on the following Tuesday to ask for the cooperation of Aquiles Centeno Pérez, a lawyer who showed them several photographs published in the daily *Novedades* in which the mothers of the ones who had disappeared recognized their sons. The newspaper reported that all had died in an armed clash with the forces of order, at the Catarina junction.

The Office of Laws and Relations of the National Guard gave the relatives permission to go to the morgue in the El Retiro Hospital. Carmen González García and Lidia González Vivas, Manuel de Jesús' mother and wife, respectively, managed to see his corpse. Carmen said, "His face was all beaten up, and he didn't have any arms or legs. He was missing an eye. If it hadn't been for his pants, I wouldn't have recognized him." The other mothers were only allowed to see the faces of the victims.

On March 2, the remains were taken in sealed caskets to the Monimbó Cemetery, surrounded by a strong guard of the BECATS, a special Army corps. The warning was complete.

Months later, in León, another horrifying action was effected — one more of those with which the contemporary history of Nicaragua is being written in blood.

It was noon on a Friday in September, 1978, in the new Guadalupe neighborhood. The guards closed off the streets and demanded loudly that the residents immediately leave the area, because they were going to burn down the houses. There was no time to be lost. To disobey the order meant death.

The women, worried by the thought of the exodus, quickly grabbed what they considered indispensable and made up bundles, unable to decide what to leave and what to take. They left their homes quickly, fearing for their men, their faces wracked by anguish and a hopeless questioning in their eyes. All the residents of one street were grouped together, and they followed the despotic orders of the agents, joining the other slum dwellers near the highway.

A member of the Red Cross put on his jacket and raised a Red Cross flag, trying to protect the people. He went to the front of the line, which passed between two groups of policemen, who frisked everybody. It was impossible to stay and watch over the others because every group of ten was ordered to keep on moving.

A pistol was found on a young man in the last group, and the policemen stopped searching. The guards became hysterical, and their ferocity knew no bounds. They wanted to seize all the young men who hadn't yet crossed the fateful barricade. They let two women by and held back a boy. His mother and sister shouted. The agents pushed the women ahead

and ordered them to walk quickly away and not look back. More women, children and older men were allowed through. Two girls, disobeying orders, stopped at one side and watched their three brothers, whom the guards held back.

The guards pushed Hilario Martínez Ramírez, 50, to make him keep on walking, but he stepped back and, refusing to obey orders, stayed with Luis Alberto Martínez Alvarado, 24, his son. The two were thrown to the ground, along with the other young men — 22 in all. All of them knew one another, and most of them lived on El Callejón Street.

The henchmen forced their victims to kneel together. A guard ordered the two girls to turn their heads, and, when they did so, the shots rang out. They looked quickly. One of the butchers was still shooting with his machine gun, and the victims were writhing on the ground.

Two of the men in uniform covered the eyes of the young girls, who obstinately refused to move away, but the guards tired of this task and became more interested in what was happening. The girls looked around at the site of the massacre. The wheels of a tractor were crushing the bodies — some of which were still writhing desperately. When all of them had been crushed, the sadists piled the remains together, poured on gasoline and dropped a match.

Petrified with shock, the two girls stared at the pyre. The two guards drew close to them once more and looked at them undecidedly for a while; finally, one of the guards said, "Go to hell, but don't go running off at the mouth."

## **EVEN THOUGH THEY DENY IT**

"Where to, fellows?"

"To see a friend," one of the two young men who were going past the National Guard post in the city of La Unión, El Salvador, answered. It was 9:20 a.m. on Sunday, October 12, 1975.

"What are your names?" asked one of the police agents walking toward them in the middle of the street.

The two travelers identified themselves, and immediately the uniformed men turned their pockets inside out and frisked the two young men from shoulders to heels. While this operation was going on, a sergeant came along who ordered them to be taken inside the command post.

The young men were Víctor Manuel Sánchez, 32, an industrial worker and a member of the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN) Party, and Alfredo Elías Orellana, a student in the university.

Alfredo Elías was accused of having participated in the attack on the National Guard post in El Carmen. Forty minutes later, the two were pushed inside a white Toyota pick-up truck, license plate P-99059, guarded

by three agents. At noon, they arrived at the San Miguel garrison. They were welcomed with blows, and Victor Manuel's gums were bleeding.

A policeman said Alfredo Elías was one of the leaders of the September 10, 1978, demonstration in San Miguel, and then several plainclothes agents walked past the student in order to identify him as "the instigator of the violation of the Law Defending and Guaranteeing Public Order," that bans mass meetings. The henchmen tied the two young men by their thumbs and beat them savagely.

About 1 p.m., they untied them, handcuffed them and sent them off to San Salvador in a National Guard Willys jeep, with four policemen guarding them. At 4 p.m., they entered the capital, and the jeep turned toward the general garrison.

Inside a closed room, they were ordered to strip. At first they resisted, but the brutal blows made them decide to obey. Those in charge, whose profession is torturing, appeared with the feared hoods.

The hood is an oilcloth, canvas or thick cloth pocket, without any opening for breathing. It is placed over the prisoner's head and tied with a string. Sometimes the inside is impregnated with quicklime. It is a method of torture used in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala for three purposes: to suffocate the victim, to hide the identity of his torturer — who is often an important member of the regime or a publicly known figure — and to make him feel isolated from the surrounding environment.

The two comrades saw the hood. They showed no terror as they looked the repressive agents straight in the eye. Their message was wordless; their bright eyes conveyed Mario Benedetti's verse:

*Take note that our struggle is good  
and our people are firm and true.  
Without further ado  
let me warn you:  
Don't cover my head with the hood!*

But the men savoring their morbid pleasure of the moment in an act they considered terrifying to their victims failed to catch the challenge. And the canvas came down brusquely, covering the prisoners' faces. Everything was dark, but the inner look remained fixed, attentive to what might happen.

They were systematically beaten in the stomach. Then silence and calm. Victor Manuel's footsteps disappeared in the distance, along with those of his jailer. Alfredo Elías was shoved along to a cell so small that it had standing room only.

He remained alone, wondering how much more he had to suffer and feeling how hard it was to be separated from his friend. Isolation is one of the most common forms of torment. The victim loses all concept of time. It's as if he entered an unknown dimension from which he was constantly trying to return.



Tied hand and foot, he could only kneel in the small, dark and humid cell. It might have been some hours later that the door was opened and he was greeted with kicks and blows. His feet were unlashd, and he was guided to another chamber. The questions bounced off his mind like water off of grease, unabsorbed. Finally, after much repetition, one filtered through: "What did you do with the plan of the National Guard garrison you were making?"

But he pushed the question out of his mind. Not one syllable left his tightly closed lips. The look was lost inside him and diluted by other thoughts: resist and perhaps die; resist and perhaps live to go on fighting.

The next day was Monday, a day spent between violent blows and interrogations while he remained handcuffed and hooded in the narrow cell, without food or water. Late at night, he heard a door open and someone being taken out. Then he heard screams. It was Victor Manuel. Around dawn, Alfredo Elías' cell was opened, and he felt a body bump into him and groan. He asked who it was. When he heard his friend's voice, he was filled with a combination of anguish and joy.

On Wednesday, they tried to force Alfredo Elías to sign a confession; who was already a ravaged human being. They kept him out all day; when he returned, he said in a faint voice, "They gave me electric shocks all over my body," and he went on to describe the horrible torture.

On Wednesday, they tried to force Alfredo Elías to sign a confession; when he refused, they gave him electric shocks, then returned him to the cell with Victor Manuel. They had been there four days without anything at all to eat. When the jailer came looking for Victor on Thursday morning, he asked with cruel sarcasm: "How are you making out with food and drink?"

Alfredo Elías was surprised a few hours later when they took off the hood and handcuffs and gave him his clothes, food and drink. They took him to a larger cell, where he joined Victor Manuel, who was also dressed, though in very bad shape because, he said, they had put the electrodes in his mouth.

At noon, they were given orders to follow two guards to National Guard Director Colonel Rosales Rosales' office. Alfredo Elías' father stood beside the top leader of the National Guard. The Colonel addressed the student, warning him, "You should just study." And he told Victor Manuel: "If I catch you again, I'll use the law against you."

The two prisoners were given back their personal possessions. Both of them, and Alfredo Elías' father, had to sign a paper swearing they had been freed and that during their stay in the garrison they had not been tortured.

The Director of the National Guard told his men to order a car to take Alfredo and his father to the Eastern Bus Terminal and a taxi for Victor. When they went outside the garrison, the car was waiting, and the student and his father got in. Further on, a red taxi was parked near the wall of the building, with its motor off. Victor Manuel walked toward it. Alfredo Elías was watching his friend as he went, but he didn't



see him reach the vehicle because their car had gained speed and the garrison was left behind, out of sight.

Victor Manuel never rejoined his family, his friends or his Party comrades: he disappeared. All legal efforts to find him proved fruitless: the public accusations made by the UDN got no results whatsoever; nor did the efforts of the Catholic Church; a motion presented by the opposition deputies in the Legislative Assembly was voted down; the only answer his relatives got from the governmental authorities was that the young man had been freed — as the departure paper he signed on October 16 testified.

On November 12, 27 days after Víctor Manuel signed that paper, Enrique Garzona Olivo, who had been imprisoned in the National Guard Investigations Section from November 2 until his release on the 12th, brought a message from Victor Manuel to his friends and family: "Tell them I am in the National Guard garrison, in spite of the fact that I signed the release statement."

But the Salvadoran government continues to maintain that Víctor Manuel Sánchez was freed on October 16. The same thing has happened to hundreds of other prisoners: the police forces deny having them in their power, even though there is evidence that they have been arrested and, in many cases, witnesses have seen them in captivity.

The Archbishop of El Salvador issued a protest and attached a list of 99 cases drawn up by his secretary of information and communications, with specific personal identification for each prisoner, the date and place of arrest and the whereabouts (when that information was available). The list included workers, students, professionals and a large number of peasants and agricultural workers. Those arrested ranged from 18 to 40 years of age, except for the 75-year-old peasant María Carlota Hernández de Blanco, of La Laguna Canton, Villa del Rosario, Morazán Department, who was arrested by the National Guard on September 12, 1977, in Santa Elena, Usulután. What secrets could she tell? How many crimes committed by the National Guard could she denounce? How many kidnappings of country workers had she witnessed?

Several Committees for the Freedom of Political Prisoners established by prestigious Salvadoran groups have gone to international organizations to report specific data on this dreadful situation in which all human and civil rights are violated; but the regime, headed by General Carlos Humberto Romero, has denied the facts.

Even so, the world is becoming aware of the truth. A typical case, one that exemplifies the rest, is that of 32-year-old Professor Lil Milagros Ramírez Huezo, arrested by the National Guard on November 26, 1976, several days after she had returned from doing postgraduate studies in Europe. She was seized along with Professor Manuel Rivera. The authorities hid the fact that the two were placed in one of their repressive dependencies. Nevertheless, they transferred Lil Milagros to a small cell in the National Guard Central Garrison in January, 1977. There she met Ana Guadalupe Martínez, one of the prisoners on the long list of those who had "disappeared."

Lil Milagros reported to her prison companion that she had been in the Customs Police Garrison until then and that she had seen 11 political prisoners there in a chamber not much bigger than the bed to which they were lashed hand and foot, some on top and others below.

Ana Guadalupe was later exchanged and went to Algeria. There, on May 15, 1977, she testified that she had seen seven prisoners whom the courts of justice denied were in jail.

The first person to bring news of Lil Milagros was Dr. Castro Ouesada, who, after he was released, testified that he had talked to her. Another person, whose name cannot be revealed for security reasons, saw her at the time a high-level member of the Salvadoran Red Cross visited her when she was very close to death from the torturing.

But, even if no one had seen her, the prisoner herself gave evidence of her presence in jail. César Valle, an employee of Basic Housing, who was arrested by mistake and held in the tower of the Ministry of the Interior Police Headquarters, said after his release that he had read on the walls: "Lil Milagros Ramírez was here."

The majority of the political prisoners who have "disappeared" die as a result of torture, unattended wounds, malnutrition, isolation, and lack of hygiene and medical care or because their captors are convinced that they cannot break their will and decide to kill them; but they all suffer their torture heroically in a silence that is, at the same time, a cry to the world.

With the Salvadoran poet Osvaldo Escobar Velado, they say:

*I will die, without a doubt,  
but my cry will remain  
sounding in the air.  
I will die, and pass on  
my pain  
to you who care.*

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